AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A combination of piston and piston ring, comprising:

a piston having a piston ring groove in which at least the piston ring groove is made of ~~steel~~ SKD6, SUS305 or SUS630, said piston reciprocally moving in a cylinder bore;

a piston ring made of flake graphite cast ~~iron,~~ iron or spheroidal graphite cast iron, ~~white cast iron, malleable cast iron, vermicular graphite cast iron or alloy cast iron~~ having an elastic modulus ranging from 130000 to 170000 MPa, in which at least a lower surface of the piston ring is formed with irregularity on the surface due to an existence of the graphite and the lower surface of the piston ring is ~~and~~ fitted to contact the lower surface of ~~into~~ the piston ring groove; and

a hard coat film formed to at least an outer peripheral sliding surface of the piston ring.

Claims 2-3. (Cancelled)

4. (Original) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 1, wherein said hard coat film is an ion-plating film.

5. (Original) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 1, wherein said piston ring is subjected to a nitriding treatment.

6. (Previously presented) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 1 wherein said combination of piston and piston ring is a combination of piston and piston ring for an internal combustion engine.

7. (Previously presented) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 6 wherein said internal combustion engine is a diesel engine.

8. (Previously presented) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 4 wherein said combination of piston and piston ring is a combination of piston and piston ring for an internal combustion engine.

9. (Previously presented) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 8 wherein said internal combustion engine is a diesel engine.

10. (Previously presented) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 5 wherein said combination of piston and piston ring is a combination of piston and piston ring for an internal combustion engine.

11. (Previously presented) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 10 wherein said internal combustion engine is a diesel engine.

Claim 12. (Canceled).

13. (Currently amended) A method for reducing the tendency of a piston ring to adhere to a ~~steel~~ piston ring groove made of SKD6, SUS305 or SUS630 in a reciprocating piston of an internal combustion engine, said method comprising:

applying a hard coat film to at least an outer peripheral sliding surface of a ~~cast iron~~ piston ring made of flake graphite cast iron or spheroidal graphite cast iron, having an elastic modulus ranging from 130000 to 170000 MPa, in which at least a lower surface of the piston ring is formed with irregularity on the surface due to an existence of the graphite; and

fitting said surface-coated cast iron piston ring into said steel piston ring groove so that said lower surface is fitted to contact the lower surface of the piston ring groove.

14. (New) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 1 wherein the hard coat film is limited to said outer peripheral sliding surface.

15. (New) A method as in claim 13 wherein the hard coat film is limited to said outer peripheral sliding surface.